

The United Nations and U.S. Policy

December 4, 1980



United States Department of State
Bureau of Public Affairs
Washington, D.C.

U. S. DEPOSITORY DOCUMENT

JAN 28 1981

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Following is an address by Richard L. McCall, Assistant Secretary for International Organization Affairs, before the Harvard Model United Nations in Cambridge, Massachusetts, December 4, 1980.

Pollsters have taken a pretty bad shellacking lately—they, therefore, may not be the most authoritative source to establish my basic premise for this discussion. The point is, however, that contrary to conventional wisdom, public perception does support the notion that there is room for the United Nations in American foreign policy. According to recent polls by Gallup and Roper, Americans by a two-to-one margin want to increase U.S. participation in the U.N. system.

Nonetheless, the consumers of conventional wisdom continue to purport that American public support for the United Nations is on the decline and, accordingly, we ought to be reducing our financial assistance to the U.N. family. In dollars and cents terms, these advocates of retrenchment have succeeded to a considerable extent. Thirty years ago, the United States contributed almost one-half (47.5%) of the United Nations' budget. Today, our share is only 25.6%, a little over \$1 billion, about \$4 for each American—less than what each of us spent to see the movie "Apocalypse Now."

Along with this less than adequate performance, outlays for programs, such as foreign aid, which are critical in creating a more harmonious international community, have also declined over time and in comparison with other countries. For example, in the past 15 years, the net U.S. official development assistance decreased from 0.49% of our GNP to 0.17%. In contrast, the total development as-

sistance effort of other traditional aid-giving countries has increased five-fold during the same period.

Why the discrepancy between our professed beliefs and our willingness to provide adequate financial resources which would reinforce these beliefs?

There are probably lists of reasons for it, none of them fully explanatory but each of them sufficient to raise doubts. Perhaps in its genesis, we have ascribed greater hopes to the United Nations than it could possibly fulfill in our lifetimes. Idealistic measuring sticks are bad bases for judgment.

The U.N.'s Record

Almost 30 years ago when the United Nations was created, it was seen as the great global instrument that would banish forever the scourge of war. Since then, there have been at least five major military conflicts on the average every year. As we celebrate the 35th anniversary of the United Nations' founding, a war is going on unabated between Iraq and Iran, violent conflicts continue in at least four areas in Africa, direct Soviet, or Soviet-backed, military interventions violate the sovereignty of three countries in Asia, and civil strife has taken 8,000 lives in El Salvador this year alone. Annually, the world spends over \$400 billion on armaments and as many as 35 countries (and even terrorist groups) could have nuclear weapons by the end of this century.

Thirty years ago nations pledged to adhere to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Today there are some 16 million refugees, one-fourth of this Earth's population is malnourished, and millions face starvation. Torture and imprisonment have

remained convenient tools of governance irrespective of race, religion, or sex.

The United Nations has had a checkered history in the peaceful resolution of conflicts. It was either impotent to act, as in the cases of repeated Soviet aggression in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan, or fearing impotency did not even get involved, as in the case of recent African wars. It has become bogged down in negotiations on the global economy, and its impact on global arms control is more exhortatory than real.

For a country that has placed so much faith in the imperatives of world order, that has spent so much effort and sacrificed so much for it—these are indeed legitimate causes for disappointment. It is not surprising then that the majority of Americans are critical of the United Nations—53% according to the polls—for falling short of their hopes and expectations about resolving international problems.

Falling short, however, is not the same as failure. As we acknowledge shortcomings—serious shortcomings—let us also be mindful of certain facts and salient achievements.

The United Nations has become a truly universal organization. Its membership, tripling since its founding, now numbers 154 nations. Its budget has increased 16 times; its agenda has grown by leaps and bounds to encompass practically all aspects of international behavior. The General Assembly, which was once an annual affair, has become for all practical purposes—counting all the special and emergency sessions and full membership conferences—a year-round meeting. The Security Council, which had fallen into such disuse in the 1950s, meeting 5 or 10 times a year,

now meets on the average of 100 times a year.

The United Nations has become the source of innovative measures to reduce international tensions. Peace-keeping forces—not even envisioned in the original charter—are in place in Cyprus and the Middle East. These forces have prevented local conflicts from festering into major wars and have been some of the United Nations' least heralded success stories.

The United Nations has had a steady, calming, and steering presence in the greatest transformation of the political geography of this Earth—aiding formerly colonized people to achieve independence without major conflicts and in a relatively orderly fashion.

The United Nations' purview over what constitutes threats to collective security has expanded to include global economic security. At the present, almost 90% of its resources are devoted to this task—to development, to environmental protection, to international trade, finance, investment, and to other measures of economic, social, cultural, and scientific cooperation. Through its specialized agencies and programs, the United Nations has increased concessional assistance to developing countries in the past decade from less than \$500 million to over \$1.6 billion. Together with the multilateral development banks (such as the World Bank and the regional banks) it has been the channel for the growth of net flow of resources to the Third World from less than \$1 billion to \$4 billion annually in that same period.

The United Nations has had a pioneering role in setting standards and rules that make the life of all of us more secure, healthier and better—in international aviation; in communications; in the protection of the environment; in the husbandry of our resources in the deep seas and in outer space; in the promotion of health standards; and in the entire range of protection of civil, political, social, cultural, and economic rights.

The list is almost endless, and with such selective illustrations I have probably failed to mention some very important ones. There is little question that the United Nations has become the central forum for diplomatic initiatives of many small countries; that through its direct and joint oversight development efforts it has transformed formerly "basket case" countries into food sufficient states. It has been a major facilitator for American investment and export, and its net-

works of solidarity among labor groups gave birth to concrete measures to make life better for the workers. And perhaps more than any other international institution it has successfully promoted women's rights.

Such is not a record of failure. I do not, however, want to dwell too long on what the United Nations has done or failed to do in making my point about the challenges we must confront today and in the future. The United Nations will certainly remain an arena of conflict between East and West as it has also come center stage in the continuing dialogue between North and South. Yet it must also become a springboard for our collective efforts to address the common problems which this entire planet faces in the decades ahead. Permit me then to focus on the critical role of the United Nations in the context of the East-West rivalry, the North-South relationships, and in light of the prospects we hold for the future.

East-West Relations

The past year bore witness to portentous events in world affairs, events that have neither run their full course nor are they as yet fully predictable in their outcome. We see the flagrant violation of the most elementary norms of international diplomatic practice and decency in Tehran, the naked aggression against the people of Afghanistan, Kampuchea, and Laos, the unceasing armed conflicts in the Horn of Africa, war and renewed threats to peace in the Middle East, and the current crisis in Poland. Each of these events has posed and will continue to pose major obstacles in the path of reasoned relationships between the Soviet Union and the United States.

Each event in direct or in subtle ways affects or is affected by the state of relationships between the two giant nuclear powers. We need not be so Pollyannaish as to presume that global interests always coincide with ours, but we need not be so simple-minded, either, as to assert that every threat to our interest is automatically a net gain for the Soviets.

The recent Soviet globetrotting from Angola to Grenada does not exactly reveal great success for their brand of adventurism. Nor does the emergence of numerous and busy Russian advisers in the area, now called the arc of crisis, suggest the tip of the iceberg of some grand plan of world domination. It does, however,

point to the Soviet propensity of opportunism: to take advantage of the opportunities created by the correlation of forces and to extend their sphere of influence.

In the coming years, I am sure, there will be a lot of rethinking and debate about the appropriate American foreign policy stance toward such Soviet behavior. One thing is, however, certain. We will either have to confront them at a point or place of their own choosing—once they are already on the move—or, alternately, work for a world order in which the correlation of forces does not favor them.

Which approach is more expensive, more risky, I leave to your imagination and common sense. Today we spend about 5% of our GNP on defense purposes and there are persuasive arguments to increase this to 7%. At the same time, we devote less than 0.05% of our GNP to the United Nations, and there are some who consider even this little amount to be too much. But the arguments about the appropriate level of defense spending is not my issue here. My point is that it is reasonable to assume that a stronger United Nations would be more capable of dealing with political upheavals and tensions.

In several recent instances, the United Nations has proven to be the preferred instrument with sufficient international support to lead the search for political solutions to international problems. In each case, this approach also closed the door on Soviet mischief.

- The United Nations provided the mechanism through which a peaceful resolution was found to the challenge of majority rule and independence for Zimbabwe.

- The Security Council resolutions laid the basis for the successful Camp David negotiations leading toward greater peace between Egypt and Israel.

- Continuing efforts for the peaceful settlement of disputes in southern Africa, specifically Namibia, could not go forward without the leading role of the United Nations.

I do not intend to suggest that the United Nations can always act as a great buffer against Soviet designs. Realism dictates that we accept the limits imposed on the United Nations' ability to act in every case. But I do suggest that the United Nations can have a tempering influence on Soviet behavior and can serve, as it has

served in the past, as a forum of diplomatic initiative to avoid direct East-West confrontations.

North-South Dialogue

In 1945, the United States emerged indisputably as the most powerful and influential nation on Earth. We shaped the United Nations in our own image and likeness and provided for it the necessary economic muscle. Over time, we were the principal architect of the International Monetary Fund to insure monetary order and stability; of the World Bank to promote the reconstruction of Europe and economic growth all over the world; and of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade to stimulate world trade.

For a while these worked ideally. We commanded the primary influence because the United States accounted for 60% of the world's industrial production and 50% of its monetary reserves. But this is no longer the case. Only 30% of the world's industrial production and less than 7% of its monetary reserves are ours today. Western Europe and Japan have emerged as major and competitive economic powers. Cartels, such as the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), drastically rewrote the rules of global economy. And a new bloc of nations, the Third World, emerged demanding a fairer share and a greater voice in the world economy.

It is this new bloc, comprised of the developing countries, that commands majorities in the United Nations and demands attention to its own priority: a new international economic order. It wants systemic changes in the world monetary system, greater resource transfers from the industrialized countries, better access to technology, and a greater voice in international economic decision making.

The developing countries' demands do not always make economic sense but there is a ring of justice in their call. After all, they comprise a substantial majority of the world's population but receive only 15% of the global income. Yet they are vitally important to the industrialized countries. The dependence of the North on the oil supplies from the South only dramatizes but does not complete the picture of how mutually dependent—indeed interdependent—we have become. And the dynamics of this interdependence also imply a condition of mutual vulnerability which begs for

intensive search and drastic resolution of the outstanding differences.

The welfare, progress, and economic stability of these developing countries have become critically important to the West and to the United States. Our trade with the Third World surpasses that with Western Europe, Japan, and the Soviet Union. The United States sells one-third of its exports to developing nations, and they supply 42% of our imports. Approximately 1 million American jobs depend on U.S. exports to these countries, as does one quarter of our agricultural productivity. We have more than \$40 billion in investment riding on the fortunes of the developing world.

This is why we press continuously, in a spirit of compromise, for agreement in the current round of global negotiations. And this is again why the United Nations has become an indispensable forum for the rich as well as the poor countries to fashion international institutions that are capable of responding to the growing global economic crises.

Global 2000 Report

This year saw the publication of two important studies dealing with our future. These studies, the Brandt Commission's *Programme for Survival* and the *Global 2000 Report to the President of the United States*, are not for the faint-hearted. They both diagnose the current state of global economy and ecology as dismal. Their prognoses are identical—the worst is yet to come.

I could cite dozens of other studies. They all point to the same conclusion, and they all urge unprecedented global cooperation as the only way to avoid global catastrophe. Yet, I am struck by the fact of how the glaringly obvious has failed to penetrate our collective psyche, how oblivious we continue to remain in the face of the clear and present danger that world hunger and poverty present to our countries, to our economic prosperity, and to our freedoms.

We are hurtling toward a future world population of 2½ billion more people than inhabit the Earth today, most of them destined to live in the poorest countries, with per capita incomes hovering at a level of abject poverty, with arable land running out, with forests receding, fresh waters disappearing, and deserts expanding.

Today, one-third of humanity exists in the absence of adequate

shelter or food, ill and idle, with no glimpse of a better future and enraged by the injustice of it all. This creates a dangerous global climate—a climate where oceans of suffering breed hurricanes of hate, lashing out with destructive force not only where they are spawned but wherever they reach as well.

In this shrinking world of ours, distance no longer guarantees safety. The crises we face do not respect national boundaries or ideological frontiers. Let me select a few pertinent projections of the future.

- In the next 20 years there will be 2½ billion more people.
- The food deficit for the Third World alone will hover around 75 million metric tons by the year 1990, drawing down global food reserves and leading to worldwide competition for food and to a rapid rise of price levels.
- The search for alternative sources of food will cause drastic depletion of fishery resources.
- Increased fossil fuel consumption and the greater use of fluorocarbons for this growing population will correspondingly raise atmospheric carbon dioxide and will cause ozone depletion, both of which entail serious climatic changes—in turn affecting our ability to produce food.
- The inability of the developing countries to meet the growing demands—for food and energy alone—of their growing populations will deplete their foreign exchange reserves, raise their debts, in turn lead to defaults and global monetary instability.
- Growing scarcities as well as the growing demands of more and more people will place unacceptable strains on the stability of many developing countries, leading to frequent political upheavals threatening every nation's security.

In a world where billions are subjected to the degradation of poverty—abject poverty—the struggle for survival will become the paramount human endeavor. Abject poverty dehumanizes because it subjects life to the exigencies of mere existence. It is a condition in which people exhaust their energies at the grueling task of just being, with never a chance of becoming. It is a condition in which people squander their energies in the fight for mere physical survival, with their talents unchallenged, their human potential unfulfilled.

Where the basic human needs of food, health, and shelter remain the

sole object of unfulfilled wants, no desire can emerge for liberty and no strength is left to protect rights. Where the struggle for liberation from daily necessities overwhelms the necessity for freedom, neither basic human needs nor human rights will ever be satisfied. And in a world where tyranny becomes the order of things, no nation, however prosperous and free, can long remain an island of virtue.

To confront these growing threats to global security, each nation, each government must do its share. None of the problems can be tackled by one country alone, and no country alone can long endure to carry the principal burden.

It is clear that the followup to the *Global 2000 Report* will require an extended program of cooperative interaction within the worldwide system of international organizations. The United Nations is the ideal focal point for strategists in formulating an agenda which could deflect projected ecological, economic, and social catastrophes in the coming millennium. The very nature of the entity that is the United Nations lends it to the creative long-range effort which could bring to fruition the massive economic development that the current world environment demands. Yet we can no longer attack problems in a piecemeal fashion.

It will not be enough merely to ask for increased funding from the world's financial institutions. We must evolve a precise strategy that will coalesce hardware with human resources, that points toward a convergence of intellectual and technological tools which concentrate our collective efforts in problem solving for both developed and developing nations.

The Challenges of Change

East and West, North and South, our present and our future—they are symbols of our concerns. Pitted against each other in dynamic tension, they reveal the promise and possibilities of change.

Will we control this change or will we permit events to control our lives? Can we allow the prognoses of the *Global 2000 Report* to come true? Can we resign ourselves to an unbridled East-West conflict and prepare to live in a world where the structures of global cooperation will have been replaced by the worst kind of international struggle for the survival of the unfittest? I need not posit the answer.

We Americans have never feared change. To the contrary, I sincerely feel that most of the change for the better that is taking place today has been prompted by our very presence in the world, our ideals, our ways, and

our responses. We created the United Nations not to put the brakes on change but to design our future.

In a month or so, I will be leaving my post as Assistant Secretary of State in charge of U.N. affairs. I am proud to have been associated with an American foreign policy that has steadfastly supported the United Nations. To be sure we saw changes coming, yet we did not fear them. We understood the changes taking place in the United Nations, and we tried to steer them in a direction consistent with our values and beliefs. So as I leave office, I am confident that the seeds of our ideals that we planted with the United Nations 35 years ago will grow into a bountiful harvest—as long as we have the will and foresight to cultivate with care and compassion this fragile structure of global cooperation. ■

Published by the United States Department of State • Bureau of Public Affairs • Office of Public Communication • Editorial Division • Washington, D.C. • December 1980 • Editor: Joanne Repert • This material is in the public domain and may be reproduced without permission; citation of this source would be appreciated.

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